



SPHENISCUS MINOR.



# SPHENISCUS MINOR, *Temm.*

## Little Penguin.

*Aptenodytes minor*, Forst. Comm. Gœtt., tom. iii. p. 147.—Licht. Edit. of Forst. MSS., p. 101.—Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 881.—Gmel. Edit. of Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 558.

*Little Penguin*, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. vi. p. 572. pl. 103.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 387. pl. clxxx.

*Spheniscus minor*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., tom. i. p. cxiii.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 644.

*Aptenodyta minor*, Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn., part i. p. 68. pl. 17. fig. 1.

*Korôra*, Aborigines of New Zealand.

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THIS species is very abundant all round Van Diemen's Land, in Bass's Straits, and on the south coast of Australia generally, where it frequents those parts of the sea that are favourable to its habits and mode of life, and where the depth of the water is not too great to prevent its diving to the bottom. It is also often seen in the deep bays and harbours, and some distance up the great rivers, but never I believe in fresh water ; seas abounding in small islands whose sides are not too precipitous for it to ascend for the purpose of breeding, being the localities most frequently resorted to. It is so numerous on nearly all the low islands in Bass's Straits, from September to January, that any reasonable number of the birds and their eggs may be procured without the slightest difficulty.

From the weight of the body and the density of the plumage, this bird swims very deep in the water, the head, neck and upper part of the back only being above the surface. Its powers of progression in the deep are truly astonishing ; it bounds through this element like the porpoise, and uses its short fin-like wings as well as its feet to assist it in its progress ; its swimming powers are in fact so great, that it stems the waves of the most turbulent seas with the utmost facility, and during the severest gale descends to the bottom, where, among beautiful beds of coral and forests of sea-weed, it paddles about in search of crustaceans, small fish and marine vegetables, all of which kinds of food were found in the stomachs of those I dissected.

A considerable portion of the year is occupied in the process of breeding and rearing the young, in consequence of its being necessary that their progeny should acquire sufficient vigour to resist the raging of that element on which they are destined to dwell, and which I believe they never again leave until by the impulse of nature they in their turn seek the land for the purpose of reproduction. Notwithstanding this care for the preservation of the young, heavy gales of wind destroy them in great numbers, hundreds being occasionally found dead on the beach after a storm ; and when the sudden transition from the quiet of their breeding-place to the turbulence of the ocean, and the great activity and muscular exertion then required are taken into consideration, an occurrence of this kind will not appear at all surprising.

Some of the islands in Bass's Straits, where the Penguins are numerous, are completely intersected by paths and avenues, and so much care is expended by the birds in the formation of these little walks that every stick and stone is removed, and in some instances even the herbage, by which the surface is rendered so neat and smooth as to appear more like the work of the human hand than the labour of one of the lower animals. The islands generally chosen for this purpose are also resorted to by the "Mutton Bird" (*Puffinus brevicaudus*), both species appearing to breed in perfect harmony.

From what I personally observed while residing on the breeding-islands of this bird, the task of incubation would seem to be mutually performed by both sexes, each regularly relieving the other during the night.

The eggs are either deposited in a depression of the surface of the ground, or in a slanting hole of moderate depth ; they are two in number, and of a small size compared with the dimensions and weight of the bird ; they are white, two inches and a half long and two inches broad.

From their incapacity for running and their total inability to fly, the parent birds are very easily captured, and when taken with the hand offer no other resistance than a smart peck with the bill. The young, until they are nearly as large as the adult, are covered with a thick coating of long down, which is suddenly thrown off and replaced by short stiff feathers, which become perfectly developed before the bird ventures upon the sea.

The note is hoarse and discordant, almost as loud and somewhat resembling the barking of a dog.

There is no external difference observable in the sexes, which may be thus described :—

The feathers of the upper surface light blue, with a fine black line down the centre of each ; the whole of the under surface silvery white ; eyes flat ; irides pale buffy white, with a net-work of dark brown round the outer margin, and with a fine ring of the same colour near the pupil, giving the appearance of a double iris ; bill horn-colour, deepening into slaty black on the culmen and tip ; feet yellowish white ; nails black.

The Plate represents two adult and two young birds of the natural size.